

May 29, 2009 - Murtha Hails Expo's Benefits to Region

Tribune Democrat

www.tribune-democrat.com

Murtha hails expo's benefits to region

BY RANDY GRIFFITH

May 29, 2009

On the eve of this morning's expected announcement of more than \$100 million in government contracts for local companies,

Rep. John Murtha did not apologize for delivering the funds.

His opening remarks Thursday at Showcase for Commerce commended area defense contractors and employees for providing a strong return on the government's investment. The event's success and growth is a credit to the local community, Murtha said.

Murtha welcomed a record 170 exhibitors, filling 215 booths at Cambria County War Memorial.

Standing before some of the national media reporters who have criticized the Johnstown Democrat's earmark funding for the local airport, police department grants and other projects, Murtha laid out some local history.

"When we started this Showcase in 1991, we had 24 percent unemployment," Murtha said.

"We've had a stimulus package here in Johnstown for a long time. This Showcase has been the key to our economic survival."

Giving a verbal nod to the recent criticism, Murtha said he drove past the John Murtha Johnstown-Cambria County airport on the way to Showcase.

"I went by to make sure the airport was still there," Murtha quipped.

He recalled the airport's first earmark to create a highway access road. The new infrastructure opened the development of The Galleria and surrounding retail businesses, Murtha said.

Additional earmarks, Murtha continued, extended sewer and water systems to allow more economic development and job creation in a community that lost 12,000 steel jobs and a similar number of mining jobs.

Funding for military contractors is also about job creation, but it's good for business and the taxpayer as well, Murtha said.

"They come because you save them money," he said. "You do quality work, and that's what brings them back year after year."

Concurrent Technologies Corp. of Johnstown has been among the largest beneficiaries of Showcase-announced contracts, and company President Ed Sheehan expects this year to be no different.

"There will be some good announcements about some contract awards," Sheehan said, hinting that one will have major positive impact on the community.

His predecessor at CTC's helm, Showcase Chairman Daniel R. DeVos, said the event is about showing off what this region has to offer.

"We are proud of what we have accomplished in Johnstown," DeVos said. "It is a business show. There are shows all over the country, but they like this one because it's friendly. There are low-cost, quality suppliers."

Exhibitors at this year's event ranged from national defense corporations such as Raytheon and DRS Technologies, to a home-based Johnstown specialty business called The Crystal Quill.

Owner Teena Petrus said Showcase for Commerce is “like Christmas” for her imprinting and graphic design business, which creates many of the exhibitors’ promotional items given away this week. The same companies often order a year’s supply while they are gearing up for Showcase, she said.

Diversity of local technology business is illustrated at booths like Memorial Medical Center’s medical simulator mannequin and Science Applications International Corp.’s tsunami buoy forecasting system.

The hospital is using the lifelike human body simulator to train medical personnel from a wide area, Dr. William Fritz said. The wireless mannequin can be programmed to respond to treatment. Its portability makes the training program ideal for everyone from rural emergency responders to medics on the ground in Afghanistan.

“It shows what we deliver,” Fritz said. “The government is getting a bang for their buck here.”

At SAIC’s 227 Franklin St. location, 15 software developers are working on a system to forecast tsunami waves before they hit populated areas, local manager Richard Williams said. Johnstown’s work force creates opportunities for new projects, he added.